Glimpses of Coulterville

Swanwick Family Built Mansion in 1850

By Christy Hobbs

Many people probably do not realize that there were mansions in Randolph County. They probably do not realize that there was one just east of Coulterville. It was called the Swanwick Mansion because it was owned by a family named Swanwick.

Over two hundred and ninety years ago a family with the last name of Swanwick came to some land just east of Coulterville and started to settle there. When Thomas Swanwick moved to the east part of Coulterville he had a helper living with him. His name was James McMurdo. The two of them built a log cabin to live in. In 1819, Mr. Swanwick was joined by his wife and nine of their children.

It is said that when Thomas Swanwick was looking out on his back yard one day and saw many different flowers and different kinds of grasses; he realized how pretty and beautiful they were. Back in England when something was beautiful like land it was called the Grand Cote. So that is how the area got its name. At times today the area is still called Grand Cote. Thomas Swanwick died on July of 1829, at 56. He is buried in the cemetery behind his cabin his along with is wife, two children, and one grandchild.

In 1850, a distant relative of Thomas Swanwick, Jonathan Joseph Swanwick, bought the property and built a three story brick structure. It was the grandest building in all the area. Jonathan decided to call the structure the Swanwick Mansion. It is believed that Jonathan Swanwick thought that the railroad was going to pass through the land. That is why he was going to build a hotel for the passengers. In addition to it being a hotel it was also going to be used as a post office depot, but that plan fell through.

According to Warren Burris there were 11 rooms in the mansion, but then Maxine Jausel said there were 14 rooms. The rooms were 16ft 2in wide and had 11 foot ceilings. There was a fire place in every room and even in the basement. The doors were 2 1/2 in thick The hallway was 16 ft wide. Even the windows were expensive; they were made out of cast iron. There was a ballroom in the mansion. In the ballroom they had two rolling doors so when a dance was held, they would roll the doors back and dance. According to Burris in the upstairs part of the mansion there was a floor where you go and roller skate. The stairwells were made of magnolia wood. According to Mr. Burris, a man who lived in the mansion for three fourths of his life, he still has two pieces of the stairwell. He used it to make a table and he still has it to this day. There were even servant quarters in the mansion which had secret passages in them. It is said that Jonathon Swanwick hid the runaway slaves there for the underground railroad.

According to Warren Burris and Maxine Jausel the bricks to build the mansion were shipped from Chester, England to Chester, Pennsylvania then to Chester, Illinois. But, according to the *History of Perry County*, the bricks were shipped from England to New Orleans then up the Mississippi river and then to Chester, Illinois. The bricks were unloaded there and put on a wagon pulled by oxen to Swanwick. After the mansion was built, it was a stopping place for travelers who were going from Missouri to Indiana.

There were 120 acres around the mansion. Parts of the mansion are still there today but it is falling down. The mansion is located in the northwest quarter of section 1 of township 4, south range 4 west.

Maxine Jausel, a woman who used to stay in the mansion with her family, said that the Swanwicks' nearest neighbor was three miles away. So when Mr. Swanwick was at work and

the fire in the fireplace had died down Mrs. Swanwick had to walk that three miles to get some firewood to keep it going.

Maxine Jausel said the mansion was really neat to stay in because there was always something for you to do no matter what. She said there was always something to do such as look out the window, go roller skating and even talk to all the different people because there was always someone new. It was even fun for you to look out the window because there was usually some kind of animal out there wandering around. She also said it was beautiful grounds with all the flowers and trees and even the different kinds of grass.

When Mr. Swanwick realized that the railroad had passed two to three miles away he turned the hotel into a home. He then asked if the town would bear the family name of Swanwick if he gave them $300.00. In 1857, Mr. Swanwick had about 1500 acres he owned and took care of. The 1870's were hard times for Mr. Swanwick and his wife. It is said that the Swanwicks could not pay a debt of $8,0033.07. Since they could not pay this on January 3, 1889, a foreclosure was put on the house. After the foreclosure the Swanwick family packed up and moved to Chester, Illinois where the rest of the Swanwick family lived. When they moved all the land they owned was soled.

The land has been owned by many people but the first owner had the deed written on deer skin in the Pinckneyville Court House and is still there to this day. The family of Warren Burris farmed the land until 1989.

The area it is on is owned by a Mr. Spragues, a lawyer out of Belleville. People still go out there to see it but the area is private property and you can not really tell what was on it. Even the people who used to live there can't even go there because they are not allowed. The only thing standing are the walls of the structure.

As you can tell the Swanwick Mansion was popular for many different things. It would be really nice if the Mansion was still there standing to this day because a lot of people would have liked to go there. Even the family members of the people who used to live there probably would not mind going to see how their families lived in the 1800s. There are even some people around this area who have been wondering what the Swanwick Mansion looked like. After doing all this research I would like to go and see what it looked like for myself.

Sources:

Burris, Warren. Interview, April, 1998

Fox, Bob. Interview, April 7,1998

Jausel, Maxine, Interview, April 23, 1998

Perry County Historical Society. *History of Perry County*, Turner: 1988

Glimpses of Coulterville

Swanwick School Once Had Eight Grades

By Dakin Jausel

Most people probably don't know Swanwick even exists unless they are from the surrounding area or in Randolph County, and most towns in Randolph County don't know about it. Swanwick is a little town that most people don't know about because the school there is shut down and the place is practically a ghost town. In fact the place has no stores, nor a library or a town hall. It's all houses. One of the main reasons it is like this is because the school is shut down. Here is the reasons why with a brief history of it.

According to Stella Runyon, who keeps history of Swanwick and has history books about it, Swanwick School started in 1923 when the community got together and started it because the town was getting bigger and they just decided they needed a school. It was a two-room brick school with one class per row. There were only four grades back then and no kindergarten, so 1st grade was in one row, 2nd grade in the next, then 3rd grade, and then 4th grade. The school also had a basement, which was a fourth above ground and three fourths under.

My grandfather who used to go to Swanwick School in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Gene Thornton, said that that there was no gym at the time but there was a basement. The only sport that was played there was softball. The school did not have baseball, basketball, football, track, or volleyball that most schools have today. On the last day of school every year before the school let out on summer break everybody played softball and had a potluck and a big picnic. Stella also said that in 1960, 5 others schools merged with Swanwick School. When this happened there was 1st – 8th grades and a gym added on. The schools that merged were Winkle School which was in Winkle, Acheson School, which was near Floyd Firche's house, Franklin School, Pleasant Grove School which was near Balton's house, and Bouldersachs School.

Janet Horner, also a former member of Swanwick School that went there in the sixties, said that once the School had a gym, it started having

Lack of Money Shut School Down in 1975

coronation and cake walks. Gene also said that the school never had a cafeteria so all the students had to bring a sack lunch to school and place their lunches on a special rack every day until lunchtime. Also, the school had coal heat. Gene, Stella, and Janet told me that some of the faculty that worked there was Elmer Irvin, he was the principle. The teachers were Cora Deganhart, from Rice.Louse Kessel, from Ava, Ebbert Lamount, Solon Fullerton, Shirley Filipsic, and one of the last teachers to teach there was Jen Firch. The bus service that ran the Swanwick school kids to school was the Buman bus service. In 1973 it did not have enough 8th graders to keep 8th grade going so there was no 8th from 1973 until it shut down. The school finally had to shut down in 1975 because it didn't have enough money to keep it going and the buman bus service shut down the year before so they had to make a big decision to merge with Pinkneyville School.

The town of Swanwick has not been the same since the school shut down. Many former students of Swanwick School went to the first annual re-union in the summer of 2004 and plan to go to many more.

Sources:
Thornton, Gene, Interviewed April 14, 2005
Stella, Runyon, nterviewed April 18, 2005
Horner, Janet, Interview April 25, 2005

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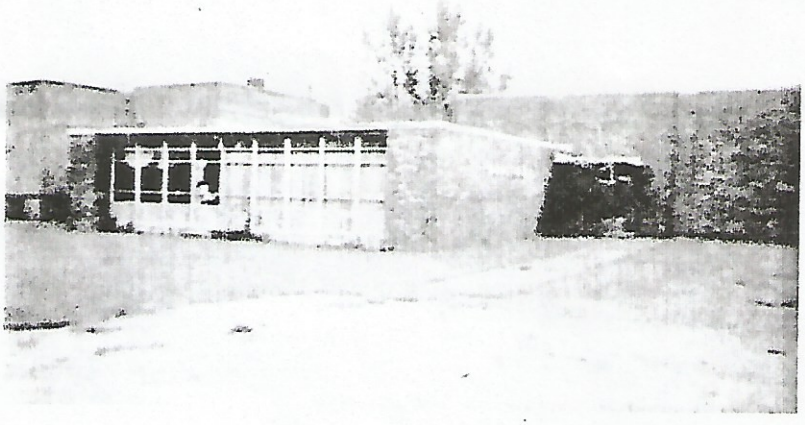
Swanwick School Then and Now

Above, Gene Thornton and a friend stand before the original Swanwick School building. Below, Swanwick School as it stands empty today. Notice the wording at the top of the original building behind the two additions.